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The role of the Economic and Social Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

Economic and environmental questions: statistics

Comprehensive report of the Statistical Commission on the work related to chapter VI, section E, of its report on its thirty-third session and on basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels, including the report on indicators on means of implementation

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Introduction

1. The present report was prepared by the Statistical Commission at the request of Economic and Social Council in its decision 2002/311 of 19 December 2002. This report gives a brief overview of the discussions on basic indicators engaged in both by the Council and by the Statistical Commission in past years and comments upon the specific issues identified in Council resolution 2000/27 of 28 July 2000. In each section of this report, some proposals are made for future activities.

2. The Economic and Social Council and the Statistical Commission have been engaged in a discussion of basic indicators related to the recent United Nations conferences and summits since 1998. A comprehensive listing of Council decisions and resolutions, as well as of reports submitted to the Council and the Commission, is provided as background reference material in the annex to this report.

3. At its substantive session of 2000, the Economic and Social Council had reiterated its interest in the topic of statistical indicators to follow up major United Nations conferences and summits held in the 1990s. The Council adopted resolution 2000/27, in which it reaffirmed recommendations contained in an earlier resolution on indicators (Council resolution 1999/55 of 30 July 1999, sect. II) and took up many of that earlier resolution's themes. In resolution 2000/27, the Council, inter alia, emphasized the need for: (a) statistical capacity-building especially in developing countries to meet the range of needs for development indicators on a sustainable basis; (b) the technical review of existing conference indicators so as to define a limited set of common indicators; (c) indicators on "means of implementation" and "global partnership for development"; and (d) the promotion of networking.

4. The Statistical Commission at its thirty-second session in 2001 accepted the invitation by the Economic and Social Council to serve as the intergovernmental focal point for the review of conference indicators and welcomed this work as an opportunity to contribute its technical expertise to the ongoing debate on indicators. The Commission plays the role of intergovernmental focal point for the review of conference indicators at the global level. Its added value is to offer technical expertise and advice on indicators which can help the Council to formulate political guidance on how to measure progress in the implementation of the outcomes of all United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields. In order to ensure that the statistical expertise of member States is fully applied, the Chairman of the Commission appointed a "Friends of the Chair" Advisory Group to conduct an in-depth technical evaluation of all United Nations conference indicators. In accordance with the Council mandate, the Friends of the Chair Advisory Group was also asked to elaborate recommendations for a basic list of indicators for conference follow-up and to make proposals for a mechanism of statistical review for future indicators.

5. The Friends of the Chair Advisory Group reported back to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session in 2002 presenting its report of the Friends of the Chair of the Commission on an assessment of the statistical indicators derived from United Nations summit meetings (E/CN.3/2002/26). The Commission considered this report together with the report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization of development indicators (E/CN.3/2002/25) and a consultancy report[1] entitled "Indicators on means of implementation". The Commission

welcomed the report of the Friends of the Chair;[2] was particularly satisfied with the broad consultative process among member States undertaken by the Advisory Group; and welcomed the indicator architecture built on three tiers and the technical evaluations contained on the United Nations Statistics Division web site. The Commission also endorsed the recommendations made in the report, and concurred that, in some areas (for example, human rights and good governance indicators), the indicators currently proposed were mostly qualitative in nature and could therefore not be technically evaluated by the Friends of the Chair Advisory Group.

6. Based on the report of the Friends of the Chair and the decisions taken at the thirty-third session of the Statistical Commission in 2002, the United Nations Statistics Division prepared a report of the Secretary-General for the substantive session of 2002 of the Economic and Social Council entitled "Progress report on basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels" (E/2002/53). This report took up all the issues listed in the above-mentioned Council resolution. The following sections examine those issues and summarize briefly the present status of the international debate.

I. Technical review and rationalizations of sets of indicators

7. The Economic and Social Council invited the Statistical Commission, as its authoritative technical body, to make recommendations regarding a limited list of conference indicators. For this purpose, the Commission established at its thirty-second session (2001) an expert group of Friends of the Chair of the Commission. Eminent national statistical experts from 34 member States contributed to the work of Friends of the Chair Advisory Group, which prepared an extensive analytical report with detailed recommendations. This expert group was particularly concerned with proposing mechanisms that would ensure a greater participation of member States in the development and adoption of statistical indicators for global and national purposes. The report (E/CN.3/2002/26)was presented to the Commission at its thirty-third session. The Commission endorsed the findings of the expert group and recommended that its report be transmitted to the Council.

8. In response to the request for a limited list of conference indicators, the expert group of Friends of the Chair elaborated an indicator framework containing three priority tiers, each with approximately 40 statistical indicators. The expert group recognized that the proposed framework must be kept under review to allow, for instance, further development in response to emerging needs with respect to future summits and major conferences. The Statistical Commission therefore established an Advisory Committee on Development Indicators consisting of 13 senior government statisticians from member States. The main task of the Advisory Committee is to periodically update the indicator framework provided in the Friends of the Chair report, in response to United Nations summits and major international conferences and taking into account the development of indicators within international agencies and advances in technical standards. For instance, in the context of the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August-September 2002, the United Nations Statistics Division, based on the guidance of the Advisory Committee on Development Indicators, will open a dialogue with the concerned stakeholders (United Nations system organizations,

intergovernmental bodies and technical specialists) to review required and proposed indicators according to their technical merits.

9. The Friends of the Chair expert group had included in its technical analysis the proposed set of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals as contained in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General on the road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/56/326) submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, and had agreed that many of the indicators for the Millennium Development Goals corresponded to the high-priority indicators proposed in its assessment and contained in a three-tier framework. However, the statistical experts did express reservations regarding the conceptual clarity or currently insufficient methodological development of a few selected indicators, which often explained the serious lack of data for many countries. The Statistical Commission at its 2002 session voiced the concern that the development of the set of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals was a parallel process with insufficient country involvement which had not been coordinated with the current efforts of the Commission to follow up on Economic and Social Council resolutions concerning indicators.[3] It asked that, in 2003, further prioritizations and harmonizations be undertaken.

10. In a further effort to connect the two processes mentioned above, the Statistical Commission asked its Advisory Committee on Development Indicators to focus its particular attention on the improvement of the metadata for the millennium indicators as well as to rationalize those indicators with a view to ensuring their comparability and transparency. Improvement of the metadata base for the millennium indicators will not only enhance their transparency, but also help to clarify outstanding conceptual and methodological problems that still need to be addressed. Furthermore, comprehensive metadata, including detailed conceptual and methodological notes, are helpful for those countries that wish to assess and ultimately improve their capacity to compile specific indicators in the future.

11. At its thirty-fourth session held from 4 to 7 March 2003, the Statistical Commission stressed the need to pay particular attention to indicators monitoring the implementation of Millennium Development Goal 8 (Develop a global partnership for development); recommended that country-level reports be prepared by developed countries with regard to progress on the commitments made by them on the assistance that would be provided to developing countries for the achievement of the goals contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration;[4] and also recommended that at least one such report should be prepared by each developed country by 2004, in time for the Secretary-General's comprehensive review in 2005 of the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.[5] As mentioned above, efforts should be encouraged to coordinate the work carried out on the various sets of indicators that are currently being used at the global level. As regards the United Nations, this specifically relates to the two convergent sets of indicators that came out of parallel processes mandated by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The Advisory Committee aims at improving the metadata for the millennium indicators.

12. In this context, the United Nations Statistics Division is also collaborating closely with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners in the United Nations Development Group in the preparation of country reports on the Millennium Development Goals. For example, the Division

participated in training workshops held by UNDP to assist country teams in the preparation of national reports. The Division sees this collaboration also as an opportunity to assess countries' statistical needs and to keep the reporting on the Millennium Developed Goals closely linked to national statistical programmes.

II. Review of new indicators used in the United Nations system

13. In its technical review of indicators, the Statistical Commission came to the conclusion that the work on establishing any new indicators should begin as part of the preparation of a forthcoming major conference or summit and should involve both policy officials and statisticians from international organizations and member States. Any requirement for new indicators should be seen within the wider context of the totality of indicator needs. As such, emerging needs must be set alongside existing needs. The statistical experts stressed that the development of new indicators should be reconciled with national policy needs for statistics and should take account of the statistical capacity of countries to produce them. National statisticians should be involved in this process. Since they are closer to the raw data, they have a unique perspective on the technical properties of indicators, the availability of any proposed indicator, and the data-collection and resource implications.

14. **In order to translate these general principles into concrete mechanisms, the Statistical Commission recommends that advanced planning for United Nations summits and major conferences should trigger a broad consultation process, including both policy officials and statisticians within the international agencies, in particular the United Nations Statistics Division. The Division, which maintains a close relationship with national statistical services, should ensure that national statisticians are consulted during the development process, with due consideration given to regional balance. Proposals for new indicators should be made to the Commission, which would report to the Economic and Social Council.**

15. All of the indicators should be detailed with reference to the structure of the priority tiers (see E/CN.3/2002/26) as welcomed by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session.

III. Indicators on means of implementation

16. The present high demand for indicators of means of implementation by pol decision makers poses two types of challenges. The first challenge is to identify a short list of indicators that can be widely used by the United Nations political bodies and the media. This has to be the first step of the Advisory Committee on Development Indicators in undertaking its work. The second challenge is to create the capacity for estimating these indicators at a satisfactory quality level. In respect of strengthening country statistical capacities, there needs to be a setting of priorities in order to lessen the burden on countries.

17. In an effort to further develop indicators on means of implementation, the United Nations Statistics Division had commissioned a desk study by a statistical and developmental expert. The report analyses the Millennium Development Goals

(in particular, Goal 8 entitled "Develop a global partnership for development") and the documentation related to the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002) and identifies 17 broad categories of means of implementation (such as official development assistance (ODA) macro-resources, external debt relief, international trade, approval and ratification of treaties, ODA by purpose, foreign direct investment (FDI) etc.). For some of these categories, well-defined indicators have been developed and are being compiled. The report lists those indicators with their respective data sources. For the areas where such progress has not been achieved, the report attempts to assess the nature and magnitude of the efforts still needed.

18. **It is suggested that the Advisory Committee on Development Indicators of the Statistical Commission, in its effort to review the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences and summits, pay particular attention to the International Conference on Financing for Development and examine, together with the follow-up secretariat for this conference in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the question what indicators are presently available and what indicators are still needed to monitor progress towards the objectives of the Conference. It was underlined that the Advisory Committee should carry out its tasks in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.**

IV. Effective coordination of statistics in the United Nations system

19. There are currently two processes through which the United Nations Statistics Division actively assumes its role as focal point for statistical coordination in the United Nations system. One involves its work as the secretariat of the newly created Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA); and the other involves its work as the unit designated to coordinate the preparation of the statistical inputs into the Secretary-General's annual global report on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

20. Through the reform of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) machinery, which resulted in the creation of the new United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the ACC subcommittees, including the one on statistical activities, were effectively disbanded. However, upon the invitation of the Statistical Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division together with its statistical partners in the United Nations system explored ways to continue the necessary process of close cooperation in the exchange of data and metadata. As a consequence, CCSA, which held its first meeting in March 2003, was formed.

21. At its thirty-fourth session, the Statistical Commission agreed that further harmonization and prioritization in the field of development indicators were needed, in particular with regard to the indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and the indicator architecture recommended by the Friends of the Chair which had been welcomed by the Commission at is thirty-third session.

22. The Statistical Commission emphasized (a) that any international list of recommended indicators should be adapted in each country to the economic and social circumstances and priorities of that country, and take into account each

country's statistical capacities and need for a phased, practical programme of statistics development and (b) that national statistical services should have a leading role in developing national country reports.[6]

23. The other concrete area in which the United Nations Statistics Division has assumed a leadership role is the preparation of the global annual reports, for submission to the General Assembly, to monitor progress towards the development goals contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The Division provides the statistical basis for these progress reports, thereby pulling together global statistical sources and analyses from the United Nations systems. All available data are being included in the Division's web site (http://millenniumindicators.un.org), where they are fully accessible to national and international statistical services, Governments and the public. In compiling these data, the Division is also collecting complete documentation. Partner agencies are expected to ensure that data are based on a reliable and documented national source.

24. Despite these encouraging examples of inter-agency cooperation, achieving the goal of effective coordination among the statistical units of the United Nations system and beyond remains a continuous and long-term process. Member States are still concerned about being overburdened with data questionnaires received from international organizations and about inconsistencies (sometimes between agencies or between national and international publications) in respect of the publication of data. Some successes in rationalizing data demands on national statistical services, for example, through data-sharing arrangements, have been recognized. Still, there is at present no effective coordinating mechanism that focuses on the issuance of questionnaires or on estimation and aggregation methods. Encouraged by the Statistical Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division had asked member States to keep the Division informed about specific examples of duplicative data collections. The Commission can and will continue to flag these problems, using its technical authority to influence concerned parties with respect to cooperating or to converging in their practices.

V. Strengthening of national statistical capacity

25. Currently, the national and international demand for statistical baseline data and indicators far exceeds the capacity of most national statistical systems to supply such information. Therefore, the statistical capacity especially of developing countries needs to be strengthened. The Statistical Commission regularly includes an item on statistical capacity-building in its agenda. At its thirty-third session in 2002, it stressed that statistical capacity-building efforts and related technical cooperation activities needed to be embedded within the national framework of development policies. It also emphasized the need to build the demand for statistics in order to secure sufficient national resources to build and sustain statistical capacity. The Commission agreed that to accomplish these objectives a broad spectrum of members of the user community, including policy decision makers, mass media, research institutions, universities and the public at large, needed to be engaged. The Commission also stressed the importance of South-South cooperation and high-profile peer reviews. The United Nations Statistics Division in close cooperation with the funding and specialized agencies of the United Nations system has continued to support countries in the efforts to build national statistical capacity,

through its advisory services and its series of training workshops; but more action needs to be taken in many countries for improving their statistical capacity.

26. In an effort to mobilize resources towards capacity-building in statistics and to encourage the coordination of statistical capacity-building programmes, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Secretariat and a number of bilateral donors launched the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21) initiative. PARIS 21 has been established as a global forum and network to promote, influence and facilitate statistical capacity-building activities and the better use of statistics. Among other things, it maintains a strong focus on the dialogue between users and producers of statistics. Its work is guided by an annual Consortium meeting and a Steering Committee of representatives of developing and transition countries, donors and international organizations. The Consortium is co-chaired by a member of the Bureau of the Statistical Commission and the Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The PARIS 21 secretariat annually reports to the Commission on its programme of work.

27. **Still, more attention to statistical capacity-building is needed especially at the level of national Governments, that is to say, the political level. The Statistical Commission calls upon the Economic and Social Council and international donors to recognize the need to support and develop core statistical capacity within member States, including statistical infrastructure, and recommends that all donor activity for statistics should recognize the need to address both national and international statistical requirements. As part of this recognition, the Commission recommends, furthermore, that the Council and international organizations and donors should promote the use of statistics to support effective national policy development and good public administration.**

VI. Points for discussion

28. The Economic and Social Council may wish to:

(a) **Note the arrangements for technical review and rationalization of indicators;**

(b) **Note that, inasmuch as indicators have a statistical and political dimension, dialogue with international organizations is needed;**

(c) **Note the arrangements for incorporating indicators for the Millennium Development Goals;**

(d) **Note the arrangements for handling other new indicators arising from the activities of the United Nations system, most notably major conferences or summits;**

(e) **Note the arrangements being put in place for developing indicators on means of implementation;**

(f) **Note that strengthening national statistical capacity is a prerequisite for many countries, particularly developing countries, of meeting the obligation to provide information in support of development indicators;**

(g) Recommend that the Council together with international organizations and donors should promote the use of statistics to support national policy development and good public administration.

Notes

[1] See Statistical Commission background documents for the thirty-third session of the Commission (2002) at the United Nations Statistics Division web site (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc02/indicators-ps.pdf).

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24), para. 66 (a).

[3] Ibid., para. 66 (d).

[4] See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

[5] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. V, sect. B, para. 4 (c).

[6] Ibid., para. 4 (f) (i) and (ii).

Annex I

Background reference material: list of Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions, and reports submitted to the Council and the Statistical Commission

1. Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions

	Title
Decision 2002/311	Report of the Statistical Commission on its thirty-third session and the progress report of the Secretary-General on the basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels
Resolution 2000/27	Basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels
Resolution 1999/55 (sect. II)	Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits
Sect II	
Decision 1998/290	Basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

2. Reports submitted to the Economic and Social Council

Symbol	*Title*
E/2002/53	Progress report of the Secretary-General on the basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels
E/2000/60	Progress report of the Secretary-General on the basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels
E/1999/11	Report of the Secretary-General on the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits: a critical review of the development of indicators in the context of conference follow-up

3. Reports submitted to the Statistical Commission

Symbol	*Title*
E/CN.3/2003/21	Report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization of indicators and reporting on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals
E/CN.3/2002/26	Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Friends of the Chair of the Statistical Commission on an assessment of the statistical indicators derived from United Nations summit meetings
E/CN.3/2002/25	Report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization of development indicators
E/CN.3/2001/16	Report of the Secretary-General on the activities and plans of the United Nations Statistics Division and the Statistical Commission in support of the harmonization and rationalization of indicators
E/CN.3/2000/15	Report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization and rationalization of development indicators in the United Nations system
E/CN.3/1999/14	Report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization and rationalization of development indicators in the United Nations system